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# IN OUR BACKYARD

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AN UPDATE FROM THE ALBERTA SPECIAL WASTE MANAGEMENT CORPORATION

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## We're Tops in Toxic Round Ups

Toxic Round Up Alberta is a program to encourage householders to remove hazardous substances from households and to increase awareness of potentially hazardous materials. Started in 1988, with eight communities participating, the program had attracted 122 participating communities by 1990 – at which time, it cost the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation (ASWMC) some \$2.3 million to transport and treat the wastes collected.

After operating for only two years, the program achieved international recognition. In a 1990 comparison of public participation in Toxic Round Ups, both Edmonton and Calgary were listed among the top five cities in North America.

In April 1991, ASWMC announced that it was extending its commitment to the Household Toxic Round Up Program for an additional three years, under which it would cover two thirds of the operating

costs in 1991, and one third of the cost in 1992. Throughout 1993, municipalities will be responsible for the operational costs of the program (sorting, packing and transporting the waste) and the Corporation will continue to cover the cost of managing and treating the wastes collected.

**For a report on how Household Toxic Round Ups are progressing, we spoke to Jolie Whetzel, M.C.I.P., Manager, Programs, for ASWMC.**

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*Mobile units make Alberta's Toxic Round Up program accessible to every part of the province.*

*Produced quarterly by the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, "In Our Backyard" is intended to keep Albertans updated on issues and solutions in hazardous waste management. You can contribute to the process by "recycling" this newsletter. Pass it on to a friend with your comments. And should you have suggestions you wish to share, pass them on to us. Our address, phone and fax number are on Page 4.*



Alberta  
Special Waste  
Management  
Corporation  
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*Q: You have some good news about the Toxic Round Up program?*

A. The good news is that the partnership is extended – with communities in 1992 financing two thirds of the operational cost. Even with that, working in cooperation with the Corporation to keep those costs down, we had over 111 communities participating at 99 Toxic Round Ups during 1992.

*Q: What has been the progress so far?*

A. In 1990, 130 communities participated, with the Corporation paying 100 per cent of the operating costs and 100 per cent of the treatment costs.

In 1991, we saw a cutback to 94 communities participating in 81 Toxic Round Ups.

While it appears fewer communities participated in Toxic Round Ups, the decline is actually the result of more cooperation between communities. In fact, the number of communities is actually greater than the numbers indicate because several communities have combined to hold one Toxic Round Up.

*Q: Are communities continuing to lend their support?*

A. Very much so. We've seen sizeable improvements in participation and volumes handled. When you compare the total volume of hazardous waste handled – including materials like used oil, glycol and paint which are now being recycled – there is a sizeable increase in the total volume of hazardous waste moving through the program. It's up by nearly 500 drums from 1990. Even more important is that, through Toxic Round Ups, proper waste management is now accessible to 75 - 85 per cent of Alberta's population.

*Q: How do you see Alberta's special waste management program evolving? Will it be reactive – responding to a continuing problem – or proactive – encouraging greater waste minimization or legislating against the production of wastes?*

A. It depends on a number of things – not least, the level of service people want to pay for; whether they are prepared to change their behaviour or prefer to continue paying for waste treatment. In many jurisdictions, the whole question of waste collection is changing dramatically, because people are saying they don't want to collect waste; they prefer to be forced



*Volunteers sort and pack a variety of household hazardous waste for shipment to the Alberta Special Waste Treatment Centre.*

not to make it. In effect, they are saying, "We're not likely to stop producing waste just because it's the right thing to do. But we would like to have it cost us to produce waste so that we have a reason to do the right thing."

Consequently, I foresee a trend in which manufacturers, as much as possible, will be working to reformulate products to have less toxic constituents. I also see the public asking for more cooperation between manufacturers, wholesalers and the retailers. The public is asking for that partnership. They would like to see point-of-sales return.

*Q: What is point-of-sales return?*

A. A good example of point-of-sales return is Alberta's Great Drug Round Up which has been going on now for five years. In this program, participating pharmacists and veterinarians accept outdated drugs or drugs that are no longer needed. It's a reverse distribution system in which the wholesaler collects back the spent product, and brings it into the warehouse to be treated as waste.

*Q: Another example might be the used oil program.*

A. It's a very good example. The Oil Recovery Alberta program is proving very successful thanks to the efforts of the United Farmers of Alberta. Used engine oils are returned to the UFA dealers from which they were bought – and collected for re-refining. Since the program began in 1991, we have seen more than 2.2 m litres of used oil being recycled. Most of that waste oil used to find its way into the

environment, one way or another.

*Q: Are Toxic Round Up volumes up or down? And do you have any idea on future waste volumes?*

A. So far as volumes are concerned, the figures tend to be misleading. The number of participants in Toxic Round Ups is up but the volume of waste per participant is down. So the result is that the volumes of waste collected are more or less constant. At the same time, we are recycling greater and greater volumes, so annual comparisons aren't easy to make.

*Q: Ultimately, won't the only true solution be a legal solution?*

A. The whole idea of the Household program is to provide a voluntary alternative. At present, all of these products can be legally disposed of down the drain or in a landfill because they are household products. The program is intended to address this – to collect things that could find their way into our environment. We are providing an environmentally sound alternative as opposed to a legal alternative.

In our view, just regulating the disposal of potentially hazardous wastes is not the solution. The solution is to bring about behavioural change – a change in behaviour that occurs not only because it is legal but because it is the environmentally proper thing to do; and because such action will ultimately affect our children's health.

For more information on Alberta's Toxic Round Up program, please call Jolie Whetzel at 1-800-272-8873 or in Edmonton 422-5029.



# Educating Ourselves About Waste

We devote part of this page in every issue to the questions we hear most frequently at ASWMC. If you have a particular concern about managing special wastes, or have some useful waste management tips to share, we'd like to hear from you.

## WHAT CAN I DO WITH HOUSEHOLD SPECIAL WASTES BETWEEN TOXIC ROUND UPS?

Unless your municipality has provided for more frequent collection, you should safely store materials you have on hand until the next Toxic Round Up. To do so, it's important that you follow these safety guidelines:

### SAFE STORAGE

- Flammables should always be stored outside the home, in a garage or garden shed.
- Pesticides and herbicides should be stored in a low traffic area, preferably outside the house.
- Chlorinated products (like household bleach) and products containing ammonia should each be stored separately.
- All materials should be stored in their original containers, and not combined with any other material.

Even the smallest effort you can make, either by reducing your use of materials that contribute to special waste, or by ensuring that the potentially hazardous materials you do have are properly handled, is a contribution to the future of our environment.



## Keeping the Community Informed

### HOW ALBERTA'S LIAISON COMMITTEES ARE HELPING TO MAKE THE SYSTEM WORK

In 1985, some of the Swan Hills residents who were involved in the siting process for the Alberta Special Waste Treatment Centre formed a citizens' group to maintain local involvement in the operation of the plant. Known as the Swan Hills Special Waste Liaison Committee, the group was organized to identify local issues and to exchange information between the plant operator Chem-Security (Alberta) Limited (CSAL), the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation (ASWMC) and the community.

When the first of Alberta's special waste transfer stations came into operation at Nisku, a similar group was organized there.

Both groups are composed solely of unpaid volunteers who, in the course of their term, hold regular meetings to review operations at their respective locations and ensure that any local concerns are properly addressed by the operators of the two facilities.

It's a job that calls for a thorough knowledge of the workings of the Alberta Special Waste Management System – including industrial standards and monitoring procedures – and a high level

of public involvement.

#### **"We act as a sounding board ..."**

*"To be effective, you need to do your homework, that's for sure." Doug Leavitt is Chairman of the six-member Swan Hills Liaison Committee. "We receive regular briefings from the operators on developments at the Treatment Centre and within the System. We work closely with the technical consultant employed by the Town of Swan Hills. And we act as a sounding board for the community – which gives us first-hand information on any local concerns."*

A millwright and mechanic at Shell Canada's Virginia Hills gas plant, Doug Leavitt heads a committee which represents every shade of local opinion. The Liaison Committee consists of three men and three women whose qualifications, says Doug, are ideal.

*"We have a realtor, whose concerns include property values. We have another member from the operations side of the oil business. We have a homemaker who is a member of Friends of the Environment of Swan Hills. And we have two members who are, or have been, involved in research and*

*teaching. All of these people bring specialized knowledge to the table."*

To encourage residents to air their views or stay informed on matters connected with special or hazardous waste, the Committee publishes a regular newspaper advertisement listing members' names and telephone numbers.

*"We invite people to contact us as a source of information and as an intermediary. We're not negotiators or administrators or watchdogs; that's not our role. We're volunteer go-betweens who work with all parties to help make the System work."*

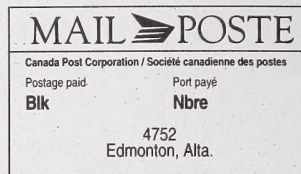
Doug Leavitt's views are echoed by Bruce Sinclair, Chairman of the Nisku Liaison Committee. An airline pilot and an involved environmentalist, he is quick to emphasize the voluntary and unbiased nature of the Nisku group.

*"I think our effectiveness is largely due to the fact that we don't attempt to represent the views of any particular body. We serve the interests of the entire community by obtaining and distributing factual information, and in certain instances, we make recommendations based on that information."*



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**ALBERTA SPECIAL WASTE  
MANAGEMENT CORPORATION**  
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Edmonton, Alberta  
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*Our mandate is to gain broader support and understanding of the Special Waste Management System – something we can do best by representing the interests of the entire community.”*

Like the Swan Hills group, the Nisku Committee invites the public, through regular advertising, to submit its concerns. And it is able to respond with accurate information provided without reservation by the operators of the system, Chem-Security (Alberta) Limited.

**“... we represent the interests of the entire community.”**

This open exchange proved its worth shortly after CSAL took over the Nisku operation.

When complaints from residents were received about the dirt piles on site resulting from the excavation of water containment ditches, the Liaison Committee was able to relate this concern to CSAL, resulting in bagging and sampling of the dirt. And when sampling

was complete, the Committee allayed any concerns as to its contents by obtaining a full transcription of the soil-testing results – on the basis of which, it recommended that the dirt be disposed of in the Leduc landfill.

*“This,” says Bruce Sinclair, “shows how a potential problem can be resolved simply by keeping people informed. It’s part of the whole process of environmental protection. And it can be very satisfying.”*

## Alternatives

Unless there’s a sudden change in statistics, this year will see more than 6,000 Alberta children under the age of five being accidentally poisoned. Statistics from the Poison Centre in 1990-91 record over 500 poisonings a month, 48 per cent of which were due to drugs. Plants accounted for 24 per cent. Household products were responsible for 18 per cent. It’s a frightening and sometimes fatal experience for toddlers. It’s also something that can be easily avoided by following these simple precautions:

**DO** poison-proof your home by keeping all prescription drugs in a locked cupboard, together with over-the-counter medicines like cough mixtures and aspirin.

**DO** keep all prescription and household products in the original and properly labelled container.

**DO** teach your children never to put plants in their mouths, and never to eat outdoor berries or mushrooms.

**DO** weed out the left-overs from your medicine cabinet regularly – especially prescription drugs – and don’t dispose of them in the toilet. Return left-overs to your pharmacist for safe disposal through Alberta’s Great Drug Round Up.

## CALL DIRECT:

- ▲ For information on:
  - Hazardous Waste Management Programs in Alberta
  - Toxic Round Ups
  - Community Study Groups
  - Used Oil Programs
  - Waste Minimization**ALBERTA SPECIAL WASTE MANAGEMENT CORPORATION**  
1-800-272-8873  
422-5029 (Edmonton)  
428-9627 (Fax)

- ▲ For information on the transportation of dangerous goods:  
**ALBERTA PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES**  
1-800-272-9600  
(24 Hours)

- ▲ For a directory of waste management companies in Alberta:  
**ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA**  
439-6363 (Edmonton)  
HOTLINE  
(for small businesses)  
1-800-661-WASTE (9278)

- ▲ For information on:
  - Recycling: Newspaper, Metals, Plastics, Clothing**RECYCLING BRANCH, ALBERTA ENVIRONMENT**  
427-5838 (Edmonton)  
297-5925 (Calgary)

- ▲ To report an environmental emergency or to register a complaint:  
**POLLUTION CONTROL DIVISION, ALBERTA ENVIRONMENT**  
1-800-222-6514
- ▲ To access the clearing house that puts potential users of waste materials in contact with waste producers:  
**ALBERTA WASTE MATERIALS EXCHANGE**  
450-5408 (Edmonton)

**ALBERTA SPECIAL  
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610 - 10909 Jasper Ave.  
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